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ABSTRACT

L. S. Vygotsky's and M. Bakhtin's theories of social interaction are so general that they are not always useful guides for classroom practice. A study of secondary school classrooms in Great Britain and the United States reveals that when teachers apply similar theories to everyday practice, important pedagogical constraints remain--both in terms of the ways instruction is organized and in terms of what students produce. The theories need elaborating. In everyday practice, social interaction is not binary, either there is interaction or there is not. Rather, participants position themselves along a continuum of involvement--from highly involved to relatively uninvolved. Learners occupy different points within classrooms, from one classroom to another, and for the same student at different times. Also, the social space within the classroom affects student involvement and the teacher's ability to track it. In classrooms with the most highly involved interactions, students participated in curriculum-making and belonged to a close-knit community. (Contains seven references.) (Author/RS)

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May, 1994

NATIONAL CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WRITING

University of California
Berkeley CA 94720
(510) 643-7022

Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh PA 15213
(412) 268-6444

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ABSTRACT

Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's theories of social interaction are so general that they are not always useful guides for classroom practice. Secondary school classrooms in Great Britain and the United States reveal that when teachers apply similar theories to everyday practice, important pedagogical contrasts remain—both in terms of the ways instruction is organized and in terms of what students produce. The theories need elaborating. In everyday practice, social interaction is not binary, either there is interaction or there isn't. Rather, participants position themselves along a continuum of involvement—from highly involved to relatively uninvolved. Learners occupy different points within classrooms, from one classroom to another, and for the same student at different times. Also, the social space within the classroom affects student involvement and the teacher's ability to track it. In classrooms with the most highly involved interactions, students participated in curriculum-making and belonged to a close-knit community.

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Crossing the Bridge to Practice: Rethinking the Theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin

Sarah Warshauer Freedman
University of California at Berkeley

Leabow and Lisa are young adolescents on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Leabow lives in inner-city London, and Lisa lives in an urban area near San Francisco. In their English classes Lisa, Leabow, and their classmates exchanged their writing for an entire school year. They didn't just exchange letters but rather they exchanged significant pieces of work, including autobiographies, books about their schools and communities, essays, and short stories. Leabow explains how the writing exchange worked for her:

> You're trying to achieve a different sort of feeling between two different sort of people with different backgrounds. And you've got to try and sort of find out. And the only way you're going to find out is, like I've said, I find out when they come back writing how you can drive at a certain age in America, and we had this really long discussion about that. And that's what we were really trying to achieve—finding out different things about each other.

Lisa goes on to comment on the effects on her writing:

> [Exchanging writing with students in England] gives us an ability to like feel what it's like in the other parts of the world. Instead of just thinking about this part of the world to think about what it's like down there or anywhere else ... If we weren't doing this exchange, you would probably just be writing to the teacher the whole time and then you wouldn't probably try as hard to get it good.

Not only did Lisa and Leabow "find out different things about each other" but so did eight teachers and their students, grades six through nine (Forms 2 through 4 in England), four classes in the San Francisco Bay Area paired with four in the greater London area. All eight classes were from urban multi-cultural schools that served mostly working-class students. The project led to a cross-national comparison of learning to write in the two countries which is described in *Exchanging Writing, Exchanging Cultures: Lessons in School Reform from the United States and Great Britain*. (Freedman, in press) This article explores one of the main themes of the study—that teachers with apparently coherent, consistent, and similar theories of learning and development play out those theories differently in everyday practice, in essence showing widely varying interpretations of the meaning of the theories. In fact, different theories seemed to underlie their practices. Since

the theories we thought they all held provide the point of departure for most suggestions for practice in the professional literature, it became critical to understand what we were observing. Our goal ultimately was to provide a clearer definition of the theory itself.

In conceptualizing the writing exchanges, the research teams on both sides of the Atlantic agreed that we understood written language to be acquired through a process of social interaction as described by Vygotsky (1962, 1978), and further elaborated by Wertsch (1991). We also agreed that the process of social interaction consists of the complex dialogues described by Bakhtin (1986). And we selected teachers whose teaching we thought was consistent with their views.

Cazden (in press) argues that writing educators focus selectively on certain portions of Vygotsky's theory and that their focus can make a difference in their views of what's important to practice. For this reason, I will begin by explaining our focus and our expectations for what would follow in everyday practice. According to Vygotsky, social interactions are most beneficial to the intellectual development of the student learner when they center on tasks the student cannot do alone but can do with expert assistance. This expert assistance is intended to help the student accomplish progressively more difficult tasks on his or her own. Vygotsky explains this process of learning and development through the metaphor of "buds" or "flowers" that, with assistance, will "fruit" into independent accomplishments (1978, p. 86). It is the "buds" or "flowers" that need to be nourished in the classroom. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of learning claims that these assisted interactions occur within "the zone of proximal development," which he defines as *"the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"* (p. 86). The implication of this theory for learning to write is that students must be engaged in social interactions that center on writing tasks that they cannot accomplish alone but can accomplish with assistance. Cazden suggests that writing researchers who appeal to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development often concern themselves with the explicit kinds of instruction needed to help students progress whereas those who focus on Vygotsky's notions of "inner speech" (or pure thought) and the processes through which inner speech is transformed into written language are more likely to concern themselves with implicit kinds of instruction, such as how children learn through play and through other everyday, informal activities. When we think about the nature of the social interaction that leads to learning, even though we focus on the zone of proximal development, we assume the interactions within that zone involve both implicit and explicit teaching. Similarly, we would assume that the processes through which inner speech is transformed into written language will be supported by informal and implicit teaching as well as explicit teaching.

Also important to the way we conceptualize social interaction is Wertsch's (1991) concern that Vygotskian theory privileges verbal social interactions. Wertsch considers nonverbal social interactions—with art, for example, or with other nonverbal graphic symbols—to be equally important. Just as he expands our notions of the repertoire of available interactions, he also expands how these interactions can be used. He explains that both verbal and nonverbal interactions are like tools in a "tool kit" (p. 93). Given the same task, individuals routinely select different tools from the kit to accomplish the task, and even when they select the same tool, they may each use it differently. Using different tools in different ways, different people can accomplish the same task equally well. Wertsch's amplification of Vygotsky's theory helps explain the need for classrooms that allow students to take diverse approaches to writing and learning to write. Witte (1992) also argues for the importance of nonverbal interactions in learning and he further posits that Vygotsky actually meant to include nonverbal interactions as part of his theory of social interaction. Regardless of Vygotsky's intent, the important point is that we advanced the belief that both verbal and nonverbal interactions play key roles in learning.

Also important to our beginning theoretical frame were Bakhtin's (1986) theories in which he too elaborates on the centrality of social interactions in our language and our thought:

> Our thought itself—philosophical, scientific, and artistic—is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with others' thought, and this cannot but be reflected in the forms that verbally express our thought as well ... The utterance proves to be a very complex and multiplanar phenomenon if considered not in isolation and with respect to its author (the speaker) only, but as a link in the chain of speech communication and with respect to other, related utterances. (pp. 92-93)

Bakhtin's approach to social interaction forms the basis for his argument that all utterances are dialogic and for an extension of individual social interactions into the cultural arena. According to Morson (1986), "Bakhtin understands discourse to be not an individual writer's or speaker's instantiating of a code but, instead, the product of a complex social situation in which real or potential audiences, earlier and possible later utterances, habits and 'genres' of speech and writing, and a variety of other complex social factors shape all utterances from the outset ... The only way in which the individual speaker can be sole author of an utterance, according to Bakhtin, is in the purely physiological sense" (p. 83). For Bakhtin, each piece of writing will be composed of the writer's past interactions with the thoughts of others and of anticipated future interactions.

With this theoretical base in mind, the research teams attempted to find teachers for the exchange project whose practices were consistent with these theories. From our initial observations of classrooms and discussions with the teachers we selected, we expected the classroom environments in both countries to be relatively similar—full of both verbal and nonverbal social interaction in which students would be able to interact in varied ways and

take advantage of the rich array of social dialogues in their experience. We expected the classrooms to be places where students would discuss their ideas and ongoing writing with one another and with their teachers, where they would read or act out each other's writing, and where they might supplement their writing with artwork. We further expected the teachers to set up classrooms where students would be engaged in challenging writing activities, where they would feel comfortable asking for and receiving assistance with their writing, where the advice they received would be valuable, and where they would feel comfortable using writing to explore their cultural beliefs and values. Ultimately, we worked together with the teachers to design the writing exchanges so that the opportunities to interact with students from abroad would complement the ongoing opportunities for social interaction in individual classrooms and thereby further stimulate writing growth.

When we began to explore the dynamics of the exchange classrooms, however, we uncovered contrasts not only between the classrooms in the two countries but between classrooms within each country. The British teachers, as a group, voiced a consistent and clearly defined theory, although in practice when they were preparing students for the national examinations, they had difficulty applying their theory to their practice. When the British teachers were able to base their practice on their theory, their students wrote with commitment and involvement and took significant strides as writers. The British teachers talked explicitly about theory, and their reflections proved central to helping us specify the meanings of the theories themselves. The U.S. teachers, on the other hand, held varied theories about the teaching and learning of writing, and consequently exhibited varied practices, and they got varied results from their students. They present a complex mosaic that sheds further light on the bridge between theory and practice.

Underlying the British teachers' ideas about social interaction was a belief that for students to learn to write, teachers and students had to share responsibility for the curriculum and for organizing the teaching/learning process. The British called this back and forth exchange inside their classrooms "negotiated teaching" or a "negotiated curriculum." The British teachers agreed that their students had to be taught to assume responsibility and that this process happened gradually across years of time. Since British teachers usually keep the same group of students for two or more years, this gradual sharing of responsibility is possible.

The British teachers also agreed that students learn to write by practicing a variety of types of writing, but only when they are motivated to do so. The British teachers saw it as their job to set contexts to motivate their students. The most motivating contexts, the British teachers believe, spring from the community of learners in the classroom. For this reason community building is valued over individualization. The British teachers explain that each child does not have a different program of study because that approach devalues the role of the classroom culture and in particular the way discussions, activities, and frequently writing are motivated by the interaction of students

with each other and with their teacher. If a student is not motivated to practice and master certain types of writing, the teachers consider it their failure in setting motivating contexts. Unmotivated students are never expected to write on a topic just because it is assigned; rather they are expected to do a different activity that is motivating. For example, in Peter Ross's eighth grade equivalent class, his very able student Dickens (a pseudonym he chose) only wanted to write stories. Peter saw it as his job to try to interest Dickens in doing other kinds of writing. In his interviews early in the year Dickens says about what he called "factual writing": "In my opinion that's pretty boring. ... I prefer being inventive." As the year went on, he told about his teacher's role in motivating him to write nonfiction. The class wrote books about London for U.S. readers, and Mr. Ross, who had formerly led walking tours for tourists, took his students on some local trips to help them gather material for this "factual" writing:

> I like what I'm doing now, about writing about London because I think the way Mr. Ross planned that was to make it interesting to start with, like taking us all round London to see, you're taking in all the sights ... I think we treated that day out not as a school trip but sort of more of a leisure trip. I think that might be the way Mr. Ross planned it. So that we'd be more interested in it when we came back.

Peter used the force of the classroom community, in particular the community adventure of touring London, to motivate Dickens as well as his other students. By the end of the year Dickens had reached the point of believing that "factual writing" is okay, depending on what type it is:

> I think it depends for me on the type of information writing it is. Cause what I don't like doing, what I hate, really hate, about English, is when you have to read a book and then write about five pages on it. I can't stand that. That's awful.

We left Mr. Ross with the challenge of getting Dickens excited about writing about books.

Unlike the British, two of the U.S. teachers expected everyone in the class to engage in the same teacher-assigned activities (or to choose from the same set of activities) while another teacher was attempting to move toward a completely individualized classroom in which each student would have a separate curriculum, much like Nancie Atwell describes in *In the Middle*. Still another followed a theory similar to the British model, that involved a sharing and an exchange of responsibilities with her students. All the U.S. teachers were involved in some kind of interchange with their students, but some were more involved than others. In two cases, for example, when the focus was on teaching the whole class, there was little room for individual variation, but when the goal was to move to a situation in which individual variation was the expected norm and the individual rather than the group was the focus, there was more room for individual variation but less sense of the role of the community. In the case of the teacher who adhered most closely to the British model, the whole class was involved, and the

community was expected to serve as a motivator. Although this teacher expected that individuals might, at times, need to reshape their own activities, she did not expect such individual reshaping to be the norm.

To make these teachers' enactions of the theories more concrete, I will contrast a British teacher who was not teaching an examination class and who therefore carried out a British version of the theory, including its focus on shared responsibilities, with a U.S. teacher who assigned activities but often left room for student choice within the frame of her assignments. This contrast is presented to provide a stimulus for discussions of what's involved in applying theory to practice.

Fiona Rodgers teaches a seventh-grade equivalent class in London; her partner Carol Mather teaches a sixth grade class in San Francisco. Although Carol in no way represents the U.S. teachers since their theories were varied, her approach will be familiar to the U.S. reader. In Carol's class students started each year by introducing themselves through "name papers" in which they reflected on how they got their names and nicknames and how they felt about them. Later they made up "spooky tales" for a yearly Halloween contest, and in the spring they entered essays on "women in history" in the annual citywide National Organization for Women (NOW) essay contest, usually taking top prizes. When Carol agreed to be part of the cross-national writing exchange project, she wanted to maintain her tried-and-true activities and, where possible, to use them as part of the exchange. For the most part the exchange caused her to make few changes. As Carol explained:

> I always start off my year with a names paper, as a way for the kids to get to know each other, because that's a good structured way to begin, to introduce the process. Of course, I was still open to what Fiona wanted to do, but to tell you the truth I don't think there's much that she sent me that has changed what I already did. (Interview, January 18, 1989)

Fiona had no set activities; nothing in the curriculum was preplanned. Her theoretical framework told her that in an interactive exchange with her students, activities must be planned anew with each class to meet their particular needs. Fiona could incorporate Carol's preset activities as long as her students found them motivating. And her class did write name papers and women in history papers, which Carol initiated. Ultimately, Fiona's decisions were based on her students' reactions to each proposed activity and to their suggestions for activities. Note that Fiona does not give her students complete free choice. Carol's students, however, did not feel it was appropriate to provide this level of input into their curriculum.

The result was that the U.S. students wrote with more formality, keeping a greater distance from their readers. They did not seem to "own" the topic. Elizabeth wrote about wanting to change her name:

> If I could change my name I would change it to Nicole for two reasons. One is I like the name. The other is becouse Nicole is a name that sounds like how its spelled so its easy to pronounce correctly unlike my name.

In her name paper, Fiona's student Farah tells about how her parents selected her name:

> My parents chose my names with ease, so my mother tells me, they didn't really argue, if they did my dad might have got a few blackeyes! Note: My mum does not dominate my father.

Continuing on about her nicknames, Farah is even more disarmingly honest:

> My nicknames I don't mind, Faty or most people call me pig as if to make fun of me. I just dont take any notice of them. Or I give them a piece of my mind. Not that it results in violence. I suppose I got these nicknames because I'm fat. Half the boys in my class take the micky out of me being fat but as I said, I dont take any notice. People I know who dont call me [Faty] are what I call friends ...

Although her writing was less correct grammatically, Farah revealed more of herself, and in a more passionate voice, than Elizabeth although it is possible that Elizabeth's writing seems constrained because she was following a somewhat formulaic expository technique, often advocated in the U.S. writing curriculum: put forth a proposition and then give reasons.

The next major project involved writing autobiographies. Fiona and Carol both helped their students make this rather daunting project easier by dividing the autobiography task into what Fiona in England called "manageable chunks." But their students' responses to their attempts allows a look at another contrast in the two countries. In both countries the teachers led an initial in-class brainstorming session about sections for the autobiographies. Neither teacher meant this activity to be prescriptive. While Fiona's students knew that they were responsible for using the brainstorming as a starting point "from within which to work and create," molding the structure to fit their purposes, Carol's students were confused. Some thought they had complete freedom of topic choice for their autobiography, while others saw Carol as unilaterally assigning everything, and still others fell somewhere between these two extremes. Belle says, "*I* just put the stuff in that *I* thought was important to me" [emphasis mine] (Interview, March 24, 1988). Elizabeth thought that she collaborated fully with Carol and her classmates to determine the topics, "The first thing *we* did was write some ideas that *we* thought would be good ideas to write about ... Then *we* made a long, list of ... interesting topics to write about" [emphasis mine] (Interview, March 24, 1988). Another student, Torch, claimed that he wrote on teacher-assigned topics but that he could select from among topics on a larger list: "*She* gave us a list, a suggestion on what things *we* should send to them, and *I* did most of the list" [emphasis mine] (Interview, April 5, 1988). But Iggy felt that he had to write on a particular set of topics assigned by Carol: "Well *she* gave us the assignments" [emphasis mine]. The result was that in Fiona's class the students' autobiographies were unique, each with its own personal stamp, in Carol's class most students proceeded to write chapter by chapter,

structuring their autobiographies similarly and with the exception of the few students like Belle, sticking to the class-generated list.

I hypothesize that the difference comes because Fiona's theory that stressed the crucial importance of her students taking responsibility guided and therefore permeated her approach with her students, and the approach was very familiar to her students. Fiona's theory permeates her talk during an interview when she explained how she approached the autobiography writing:

> It's a project that, after the initial setting up, ... they are then *responsible* for. And in my experience projects like that, where they are *responsible* for finding information, they've got it all in their heads. They know what they're doing. They can start at any point in the autobiography, any chapter that they like. They can include any diagrams, any photographs, any maps, any pictures. Obviously I make suggestions, but they could be *responsible* for it. They were shaping it. They were, you know, bringing their stuff to the lesson. They knew what they were getting on with, and that is important ... because it creates that feeling of *responsibility*, and when that's finished, a huge sense of achievement that it's something they've done, that they've been directly *responsible* for. It's not something that the teacher has given them and said, "Answer this. Do this. Do that." They are *responsible* and ... then as a teacher, you can ... give suggestions to help them produce something that they want to produce rather than, "I'll give you the answer" ... And so I'm there as a helper ... If I say half way through a lesson or whatever, "... Why don't we just have a quiet time now where you can get on with thinking about and working on your own?" ... You're not kind of like imposing it in a sort of dictatorial way. It's a natural thing. They want to get on with their work, and they get on with it in that way, which is nice. You know and there were times with the autobiography where they were just completely absorbed in whatever they were doing ... It was good. It worked. [emphasis mine] (Interview, May, 1988)

This contrast in the two teachers' approach to sharing responsibilities with their students took an interesting turn in the "women in history" papers. Fiona began introducing this topic in the usual British fashion by discussing the idea for writing on it with her class. However, once the students had decided that they wanted to write about women in history, Fiona discovered that neither the school nor local libraries had very many books about women. What was readily available focused mainly on the royal family, Florence Nightingale, and the suffragettes, and there were virtually no books on famous black women. With these limited resources, Fiona's students' had difficulty finding subjects they felt connected to; if they chose to write about someone other than a member of the royal family, Florence Nightingale, or the suffragettes, they could find little to read. As a result, many became frustrated and felt detached from this writing.

By contrast, Carol's students wrote about famous women from the past every year for a National Organization for Women (NOW) essay contest. During the exchange year, Carol planned to have her students send the "women in history" papers they wrote for the NOW contest to England. The class had no say in whether or not they would do this writing, but once Carol had assigned the topic, she had plenty of resources to support their choices.

She had applied for and received several grants in the area of women's studies, which had allowed her to purchase an impressive array of materials about famous women for her classroom. Her students had easy access to these materials. Given her personal expertise and the resources she had gathered, Carol was able to provide a context that motivated many of her students, especially the girls, and then to provide numerous possibilities as they tried to decide who interested them. The result was that those students in Carol's class who were motivated by the idea of writing about women in history could negotiate with her until they chose an appropriate topic. Unfortunately, given the large size of her class, some students fell between the cracks. However, as in previous years, two of Carol's students took top prizes for the sixth graders in the NOW contest: Athene won first and Elizabeth second.

Elizabeth's experiences show what happens when a student is interested in the topic and shares decision-making with the teacher. Elizabeth wrote about Winnie Mandela because, as she explained it, "I wanted to do someone political, that has ... influenced my life in some way" (Interview, March 24, 1988). She noticed that Mandela "wasn't in any history books I've ever read." Elizabeth drew selectively and thoughtfully from her reading to construct her essay. She begins "Winnie Mandela: The Soul of South Africa" on a personal note, telling the reader why Mandela is "important to me":

> Winnie Mandela has always seemed important to me because she fights oppression. She knew that what was going on in South Africa was wrong and she was prepared from childhood to fight until there was a change. As Winnie Mandela once said in her childhood years, "If they failed in those nine Xhosa wars, I am one of them and I will start from where those Xhosa's left off and I will get my land back." She was speaking about the wars that black people waged against white people and lost. All her life she tried to get the land of all South African's back from white control and she probably will keep trying until she dies. And even then her soul will live on in the thousands of other black people who follow her lead.

Elizabeth's issue-focused essay comes to life as she quotes Mandela and as she creates images of Mandela's soul living on as "other black people ... follow her lead." The essay continues with a paragraph about Mandela's childhood and her relationship with her parents, paragraphs on how she met and married Nelson Mandela, his years underground, his imprisonment, Winnie Mandela's displacement from her home, and her own political evolution. Elizabeth makes her points by giving numerous examples of Mandela's independent political activities:

> In Brandfort Winnie made a lot of changes. She went in stores no black went into. At the police station she used the white entrance. She went into the white side of the post office. At the supermarket blacks were supposed to use little windows to do their shopping, but when Winnie started shopping inside the other blacks did too. Some stores even had to close the windows. Also there was a dress shop where blacks had to stand outside and point to which dresses they liked; they were not allowed to touch them. One day, Winnie wanted to buy a dress for her daughter. She and the sales lady

had a furious argument. This incident became the talk of the town and the blacks went on strike. Now any black can go in and buy a dress.

In her conclusion, Elizabeth brings her essay back to what is personally meaningful to her:

> To me, Winnie Mandela is someone to look up to. I truly believe that even though Winnie Mandela changed only a small part of apartheid in South Africa, she is to be greatly admired throughout the world for her great leadership and commitment in the struggle. She had shown great courage and strength by breaking the law in a country that hates black people so much that they will even jail the children. She had had her husband taken away from her, been banished from her home and banned from communicating with other people, but still she fights. I would like to be like this woman—able to fight, able to care and able to commit myself totally to what I believe in.

As is usually the case in U.S. classrooms, some students remain uncommitted to assigned writing. A number of the boys in Carol's large class resisted writing about famous women, and their writing was much like that from Fiona's class, which illustrates the consequences of a lack of commitment. For example, Iggy, another one of Carol's students, wrote about Mother Teresa. As he admits, "I didn't try so much in this one." Whereas Elizabeth devoted a month to her essay, Iggy spent only three days on his. When asked why he selected Mother Teresa, he could only say, "I just found somebody ... that's known, and I did her" (Interview, April 5, 1988). To Iggy, writing this "women in history" paper was like writing a "book report," a kind of writing he defines as boring and unimaginative, involving only the chronological retelling of facts that other people have already written about. He did not make good use of the available resources, and relied a great deal on the encyclopedia. In fact, he opens his essay with encyclopedia-like facts about Mother Teresa's life:

> On August 29, 1910, a child was born to an Albanion couple living in Skopje, Macedonia, which was to become part of Yugoslavia. This childs name was Gonxha, Agnes, Bejaxhia, a name less easy for Western tongues to pronounce. She was soon to become Mother Teresa.

After presenting a couple more facts about her career, Iggy continues with a list of unsupported opinions and assertions about what he claims to have learned:

> I think mother Teresa is a brilliant woman, I have learned a lot from her.
> I have learned to value life and to cherish all that I may recieve
> I have learned to help people nomatter if they ar friend or foe.
> She has taught to help people have less than I.
> Mother Teresa is a woman full of compassion.

He ends with a few more facts:

She has convents all over the wor( )
Some of the places are Calcutta, Beng( ), and San Francisco.
I went to the convent in San Francisco. The nuns their were very Nice. I think many people have learned things froms mother Teresa's deeds.

Iggy explains that his mother made him visit the convent and volunteers, "I don't know why." In spite of his mother's extraordinary efforts to help Iggy find some connection to his topic, Iggy remained unengaged. His lack of effort coincided with his lack of enthusiasm and illustrates the relative futility of having students write when they aren't interested.

In England, Susanna, in Fiona's class, illustrates a similar lack of commitment. Although she strayed from the library resources and wrote about Janet Jackson, her report is fairly typical in that it is purely a rendering of the facts of Janet Jackson's life. It begins:

Twenty years ago a little girl was born in to the famous jackson family.she is the youngest out of nine children with six brothers andthree sist ers.

Susanna then tells about Jackson's rise to fame with her hit "Dreamstreet," which was released when she was eighteen and "the brightist new star on telev ison show FAME." She provides some interesting details:

lately she has a key in the hoop of her earing. some people say it isthe key to her heart and others say it the key to the animal cage(thejackson has a miniature zoo on the grounds around th eir home).

Susanna concludes: "she has been to a disco once at a studio 54 in new york." It is interesting to note Susanna's many typographical and mechanical errors, which likely stem, at least in part, from the fact that she used a computer.

As their last exchange offering, Fiona's students worked together in small groups to produce teen magazines. The students, not Fiona, chose the shape it would take. They also decided what to include in their magazines through a process of compromises and some bartering with Fiona. An example of one of the tables of contents from the magazine, *It's Push*, shows some of the types of articles the included:

Contents

1 The Plane Crash—story by Nicola
7 Don't Go To Sleep—story by Farah
23 The Hallowe'en Mysterie—story by Bridgetna
31 Fan clubs [lists real addresses for fan clubs for two popular rock groups and two popular singers, with advice about mailing]
33 —> Posters [cut out magazine picture of a singer dancing to her own music, with lyrics included in magazine]
39 Small Talk [gossip column]
41 Bits and Bobs Page [reviews of films and records, list of famous pop artists with birthdays in May]
43 Brat Packers [list of male stars and their "leading ladies"]
45 With A Little Help From My Friends [lyrics from Beatle tune]

47 Fashion [magazine cut outs of different styles, cut outs of prices, labels written for clothes with editorials on when they are worn]
51 Hair styles [magazine cut outs of different hair styles, hair products, and directions for how to create styles]
55 Stars [horoscope]
57 Idea Page/Recipes
59 Differences Between Juniour and Senior School
61 3 Typical Lessons
63 My First Day At BCS [Broadbent Comprehensive School]
65 English Assessment
67 Interview With Mr Dean—tutor of 25W
69 Differences between Junior/Senior school
71 Our Timetable [school class schedule]
73 Best Friends—story by Kelly.

At this point late in the year Fiona's students took on increased responsibility. Unlike Fiona, Carol did not articulate the assuming of responsibility as one of her central or long-term goals, and there was no evidence that Carol's students were moving in the direction of assuming increased responsibility. Although the British philosophy moves beyond individualized and student-centered approaches, it does not leave the students free to make any choices they want. Rather it includes the teacher as a responsible co-partner who motivates the students as a class. In addition the teacher keeps a vigilant watch and adjusts the curriculum for those who are not motivated by the group activity. In the process, the teacher insures that everyone will stretch and grow. Fiona emphasizes that for students really to grow as writers, to be truly responsible choice-makers, students and teachers must be:

> choosing something which, yes, is interesting, but also sometimes it's choosing something which will stretch them as learners. And so you're working together to develop and push them to higher standards and to produce better material and, and more interesting work.

As the Teachers' Guide at one of the British schools noted, "If you want something to happen in a large organisation, you must structure it to happen." Differences in the ways teaching and learning transpired were tied to differences in how schools were structured. The British schools that participated in the exchanges were structured to support teachers in creating close classroom communities. These community structures helped the teachers to learn about their students' academic and social needs and to design ways of meeting them. These structures also were designed to create close whole-school learning communities, integrating diverse students from diverse backgrounds into this community while still honoring, promoting, and maintaining the students' specific cultural identities. All of the British schools featured (a) subdivisions of the whole school into smaller working units; (b) small class and school size; (c) long spans of time for teachers to work with the same group of students; (d) teachers' communities (classrooms were arranged in discipline-based clusters and there were substantive

department meetings); (e) students' classroom communities (students sat at tables with four to six of their friends); and (f) in two cases, community schools. For the most part, the U.S. schools did not have such structures. In the main, community-building activities in the U.S. schools were purely social, focusing on sports events or school dances. Although all of the U.S. exchange teachers worked to create strong classroom communities, they often ran into difficulty because of the lack of school-level support.

Both Vygotsky's and Wertsch's concepts of social interaction and Bakhtin's notions of multivoiced dialogues are too general to account fully for the interactions in these classrooms. In their work for the writing exchanges, most students were interacting and learning, but the depth of their involvement in classroom activities varied and thus also the extent of their learning varied. In everyday practice, social interaction is not a binary feature, a yes/no proposition (either there is interaction or there isn't). Rather, the participants in any social interaction position themselves at some point along a continuum of involvement—from highly involved to relatively uninvolved. In the writing exchanges, learners occupied varied points on the continuum—within classrooms, from one classroom to another, and for the same student at different times.

Although students may shift their position from one activity to the next, and although some students in every classroom are more involved than others, the nature of the social space within the classroom seems to affect the level of student involvement and the teacher's ability to keep track of the involvement of particular students. Some classroom spaces led to highly involved interactions for large numbers of students, while others either promoted or allowed more room for surface interactions. In this study, the classroom settings that led to the most highly involved interactions were those in which students participated in curriculum-making and felt that they were an integral part of a close-knit community. For this reason, in U.S. classrooms when students took little responsibility for the curricular decision-making students generally were less involved than in those in which students assumed more such responsibility. Similarly, in British classes when students were preparing for the national examinations, students showed less involvement in their writing, even though they cared about doing well. Although the potential strength of social interaction for learning is clearly affected by whether the social interaction occurs within Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, those variables that promote depth of involvement seem prerequisite to activating the academic potential of the interaction.

Second, the way the classroom was organized affected the students' opportunities to participate in ways that were both involving and appropriate to their developmental levels. The students in every classroom presented a mixture of abilities and interests, whether the class was officially labeled mixed-ability, gifted, or remedial. The teachers who seemed best suited to meeting the needs of the varied individuals created community from this mixture. The community was built upon the foundation of the interests of the particular individuals in the class. Within the context of communal

activities, individuals were able both to continue to build and express their interests and with the help of their teacher to shape literacy activities that were developmentally appropriate. In these classrooms, the teachers had structured the community in ways that also allowed them to keep track of and stimulate the involvement of varied individuals.

This elaboration of Vygotsky's theory of social interaction—to explicitly include the notion of a continuum of involvement and to examine the kind of social space necessary to promote high levels of involvement—suggests a need for research in several areas. First, it will be important for future bridging studies to define the principles that encourage students to become highly involved in classroom-based social interactions. This study looks at one such variable, the social space in the classroom, but undoubtedly, there are others. Second, we will need ways of accounting for student involvement. On first impulse, one might think about verbal participation as a possible indicator of involvement. Hearkening back to Wertsch and Witte, however, who argue against privileging the verbal, students can be highly involved in the intellectual life of the classroom, actively listening and interacting with texts, with adults outside the classroom, and with other nonverbal media, while only minimally interacting verbally within the classroom. At the same time, some students may interact verbally, but their interactions might rest on the surface of the material rather than run more deeply into it. According to Bakhtin, our internal conversations, the dialogues that make up our texts, will inevitably be richer if they occur in sociocultural and cognitive spaces where multiple voices and multiple ways of voicing are welcomed. As educators we must continue to try to understand the nature of the pedagogical spaces that meet these criteria; this study attempts to offer a beginning.

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5513 Tolman Hall • Graduate School of Education
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